

## THE THOUSAND AND ONE NIGHTS OF PARIS: AN INDIAN TRAVELLER AT THE 1867 UNIVERSAL EXHIBITION

Filipa Lowndes Vicente  
filipa.vicente@ics.ul.pt

### 1.- Travels in Europe (1867-1899): identities on the move.

Travelling is an essential part of the biography of the Goan physician and historian José Gerson da Cunha<sup>1</sup>. He did more than go on voyages, which always imply a return home –his life was marked by mobility and by emigration to a variety of geographical spaces. This continuous ambivalence between belonging and not belonging is essential to help us understand his life story as well as his writings and the multiplicity of his interests. In line with what Edward Said confessed about his own identity, Gerson da Cunha belonged to various worlds while not fully belonging to any of them<sup>2</sup>. The first time he left his native Goa was in 1861, when, aged 16, he went for further education in Bombay, where he continued his studies in mathematics, natural sciences and English<sup>3</sup>. This passage from Goa, a Portuguese colony, to one of the main cities of British India, a centre for trade and a meeting point of various communities, was to become definitive. Up to the end of his life, his address would be in Bombay, the place from where he departed and to which he returned and where he acted out his professional and civic life. Goa was always to remain his sentimental home, as well as a theme of many of his

1 About José Gerson da Cunha, see MORAES, George Mark (1967) "Dr. José Gerson da Cunha 1844-1900", *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bombay*. Dr. José Gerson da Cunha. Memorial Volume, vol. 1964-1965, 1-50; CUNHA, José Gerson (1925) *Francisco Caetano da Cunha e sua família* [Esboço biográfico de Francisco Caetano da Cunha escrito em 1870, seguido de um In Memoriam dedicado a José Gerson da Cunha compilado pelo seu irmão António Maria da Cunha], Nova Goa, Tip. da Casa Luso-Francesa; GRACIAS, João B. Amâncio (1901) "Notícia necrológica e biográfica de Gerson da Cunha", *O Instituto*, vol. 48, 1, 47, 49.

2 SAID, Edward W. (1993) *Culture and Imperialism*, London, Chatto & Windus, XXX.

3 CUNHA (1925), 33-34. About the Goan 19th century elite, see the excellent recently published book by PINTO, Rochelle (2007) *Between Empires. Print and Politics in Goa*, Oxford, Oxford University Press: "Introduction: The Goan Elite and their Nineteenth Century", 1-34.

historical and archeological incursions.



Fig. 1. José Gerson da Cunha, 1878. Carte-de-visite made at the studio of Lorenzo Suscipj, in Rome. (BNCF, Manuscripts, Carteggio Emilia Peruzzi, Correspondence between Gerson da Cunha and Emilia Peruzzi, Rome, Hotel Minerva, Cass. 90, n° 9).

Beyond these “two Indias” – Portuguese India and British India –, Europe would also take up a predominant role in his itinerary and was essential for his formation, both as a physician and an orientalist. On this continent too, it makes better sense to talk of Europes, for in spite of the tendency to bring together the variety of nations in a single word, which seems logical for those who come from faraway, his Europe was made up of many Europes. Distance was not beneficial to the frequency of his European *tours* but, as if they were the result of careful planning, every ten years Gerson da Cunha left his family and his duties as a medical doctor and would depart for several months. 1867, 1878, 1889, 1899: four dates for as many voyages to Europe, the first three coinciding with the Parisian universal exhibitions which he visited. In 1900, when another great exhibition opened in Paris, Gerson da Cunha had already returned to Bombay where he came to die in July of that same year.

In India or in Europe, Gerson da Cunha’s geographical movements made him always feel a foreigner, which led him to assume a series of different

identities. His practice as historian, archeologist, physician or collector, as well as his interests, writings and relationships, were all affected by his movements, as well as by the certainty that he did not belong to any one place. The specificity of his situation – “unhomely”, to use Homi Bhabha’s expression – made him a privileged witness of the build up of many nations, some real some imaginary, which were occurring in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century<sup>4</sup>. The notion of cosmopolitanism can also be useful to understand how Gerson da Cunha chose “living at home abroad or abroad at home – ways of inhabiting multiple places at once, of being different beings simultaneously, of seeing the larger picture stereoscopically with the smaller”<sup>5</sup>. Between the East and the West, between Europe and India, but also between the various Indias and the various Europes, Gerson da Cunha subverts these oppositions. Being a hybrid in his geography as well as in his identity, he forces us to rethink the notion of voyage as a movement between two different locations. But if this multiplicity of identities almost push him off the map, on the other hand they place him in a privileged observation point, that of someone who is situated in a frontier from where he can grasp the various places that surround him.

From a global perspective, the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century saw a huge increase in all types of travels and movements. Adding to those travelling for pleasure or for health reasons, as well as to the new type of cheaper group travelers, there were also those specialists in different areas of knowledge who went abroad for conferences and universal exhibitions, apart from those who had to emigrate in order to improve their living conditions. The space through which people travelled increased in dimension, while at the same

4 BHABHA, Homi K. (1997) “The World and the Home”. In: McCLINTOCK, Anne; MUFTI, Aamir; SHOHAT, Ella (ed.) *Dangerous Liaisons: Gender, Nation, and Postcolonial Perspectives*, Minneapolis and London, University of Minnesota Press, 445-455, esp. 445, quoted in “Apresentação”, RIBEIRO, Margarida Calafate; FERREIRA, Ana Paula (eds) (2003) *Fantasmata e Fantasias Imperiais no Imaginário Português Contemporâneo*, Oporto, Campo das Letras, 15.

5 POLLOCK, Sheldon; BHABHA, Homi K.; BRECKENRIDGE Carol A.; CHAKRABARTY, Dipesh (2002) “Cosmopolitanisms”. In: POLLOCK, Sheldon; BHABHA, Homi K.; BRECKENRIDGE Carol A.; CHAKRABARTY, Dipesh (eds) *Cosmopolitanisms*, Durham and London, Duke University Press, 11. The book by Susan Bayly, which analysis the cosmopolitanisms and the mobility mechanisms of intellectual Vietnamese and Indian families between colonialism and post-colonial times is a good example of other ways of approaching the “colonized”. She concentrates on the privacy of family and intimate memories of the present, studied by means of an anthropological and historical approach. She prefers to use the word “intelligentsia” rather than “elite” to describe these families, whose mobility could also alter their position in society: BAYLY, Susan (2007) *Asian Voices in a Postcolonial Age. Vietnam, India and Beyond*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

time distances were becoming shorter. With the tremendous development of railways during the second half of the century, both in Europe as in India, as well as with the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869, India became nearer to Europe, while Europe also became nearer to India. A popular guidebook listed some of the factors that had contributed towards a greater proximity between Europe and India: the possibility of through boat travel, the electric telegraph and the failed attempt to separate India from Great-Britain, an obvious allusion to the 1857 revolt against the British government<sup>6</sup>. The author made a point of recognizing the contributions of various distinguished orientalist to the guidebook, underlining that by making their research and insights available to that type of publication they were also contributing towards the development of Indian tourism, which was inseparable from a wider context of knowledge about India. One of the consequences of the changes in mobility was a significant increase in the number of travelers both going and coming: in India basic infrastructure and tourist facilities were developed in order to take in the larger number of European travelers – which included organized tours as well as the increase in guidebook production. But there were also many more Indians travelling abroad and there seemed to be more and more reasons for their doing so.

In spite of this raise in the number of Indian travelers going to Europe, for leisure, study, or work, historiography has neglected this tendency, and has preferred to concentrate on those departing from Europe for many parts of the world. Furthermore, the research that has centered on analyzing the paths of Indians in Europe tends to concentrate on British colonial relations, ignoring the many other cases which do not fit into this narrative. Gerson da Cunha is one such case. From Goa, at the time a peripheral colony belonging to a peripheral country, he goes to Bombay to study medicine for several years and then leaves to go to Edinburgh and London to specialize in obstetrics. The identity of a Goanese in Great-Britain suggests a more complex position than that of an Indian who had come from British India. Within this context,

6 [EASTWICK, Edward B.] (1859) *A Handbook for India; being an account of the three presidencies, and of the overland route; intended as a guide for travellers, officers, and civilians; with vocabularies and dialogues of the spoken languages of India. With travelling map and plans of towns*, Part I – Madras; Part II – Bombay, London, John Murray, I. For an example of a hybrid publication which was both a travel guide and a manual on the British colonies, see (1884) *Bradshaw's through route overland guide to India, and Colonial Handbook; or Manual for Traveller's in Egypt, Turkey, Persia, and India; The Australian Settlements and New Zealand*, London, W. J. Adams & Sons; Bradshaw's guide office.

an Indian from British India was obviously identified as a colonial subject in the metropolis of the Empire, even if in another European city, such as Paris or London, he might assume an identity that allowed for equal relationships. The Indian ethnicity which placed him side by side with other Indians who were natives of British India did not correspond to his Portuguese nationality inherent to his Goan origins, which gave him a specificity in relation to what others expected of him. Even if perceived as different and exotic, outside the metropolitan centres of empire an Indian could take on other positions, distinct from what the colonial context could furnish him with.

Does it make sense to place such a wide variety of people, who are traveling for different reasons and who come from various geographical, religious and social contexts, in a common 'Indian' genealogy that may obliterate all that separates them, while at the same time building up forced semblances? While trying to find common threads between these various travelers we run the risk of forcing similarities while undermining their specific differences. The reasons why Indians, mostly males, chose to visit a European country, nearly always Great-Britain, became during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, ever more diverse: to establish commercial ties or to pursue higher studies; to take part in colonial or universal exhibitions – as characters in the scenarios or as organizers of the event; to proceed on educational Grand Tours, particularly in the case of young Rajahs; to take part in academic meetings, such as conferences, or to develop political and commercial relations; to enjoy sheer leisure or as a form of political resistance, or even exile<sup>7</sup>.

7 Some examples: BURTON, Antoinette (1996) "Making a Spectacle of Empire: India Travellers in Fin-de-Siècle London", *History Workshop Journal*, n° 42, 96-117; BURTON, Antoinette (1998) *At the Heart of the Empire. Indians and the Colonial Encounter in Late-Victorian Britain*, New Delhi, Munshiram Manoharlal; MUKHOPADHYAY, Bhaskar (1999) "Home and the World. Voyage, traduction et domicile dans la modernité bengalie". In: "Dossier: L'Europe vue d'ailleurs", *Genèses. Sciences sociales et histoire*, n° 35, June, 5-30. The catalogue-exhibition *Between Worlds. Voyagers to Britain 1700-1850* concentrated on some specific cases of non-Europeans, particularly on people belonging to local elites, who traveled to Great-Britain precisely at the period that preceded an increase in travel and the consolidation of the British colonial empire. The most illustrious Indian travelers of this period were Raja Rammohun Roy and Maharaja Dalip Singh, who were admired in Europe mostly because they represented European values: HACKFORTH-JONES, Jocelyn; BINDMAN, David; RAY, Romita; PRATT, Stephanie (eds) (2007) *Between Worlds. Voyagers to Britain 1700-1850*, London, National Portrait Gallery, 17-18, 96-116. See also: VISRAM, Rozina (2002) *Asians in Britain. 400 Years of History*, London, Pluto Press, esp. 44-168; this last book concentrates mostly on those Indians who lived in Great-Britain, for a variety of reasons and at different periods, and not so much on the phenomenon of those travelers who were away for temporary periods.

Apart from the practical and physical limitations of traveling there were other obstacles which were even more difficult to overcome: Hindu tradition dissuaded Brahmans from travelling abroad, for it was considered a form of impurity and many Hindus did not travel for they feared that they might not be able to recover their place in the caste system on their return home. These restrictions became with time gradually more flexible for Hindus, but there were many other Indians, Parsis, Catholics or Muslim who would make their way to Continental Europe for a variety of reasons.<sup>8</sup> Many of these voyages became published narratives where the “provincialization of Europe” is revealed, to use Bhaskar Mukhopadhyay’s expression, which was later used in the title of Chakrabarty’s book<sup>9</sup>. The reactions of these travelers could combine elements of admiration and scorn, for there would also be criticism of materialism, of the poverty of the cities, of criminality, of moral and spiritual degradation, together with praise of modernity, of progress and education.

The case of Gerson da Cunha, as that of the other Indians from Portuguese India, challenges the distinction and separation between the western and the eastern cultures, a theme that has mostly been dealt within the bibliography about Indians from British India. The vast erudition of a traveler such as Gerson da Cunha covered Indian as well as European references; his intellectual formation was the result of European as well as of Indian books; the languages he spoke were both European and Indian; his family tree included Portuguese as well as Indian ancestors; and, lastly, his Catholic faith, although made up more of culture and values rather than a day-to-day lived faith, obviously brought him closer to Europe. In his case, as in that of others, this *recognition* of a European culture does not seem to imply the negation of what might be described as Indian culture, nor was it a refusal of what was Indian in his formation or in his identity. His experience of the universal exhibitions is a good example of these shared values. Gerson da Cunha is not European but recognizes himself within and identifies with the values of progress, modernity, technology and universalism than were promoted by universal exhibitions.

8 One example of the many available could be: NADKARNI, Rao Bahadur Ghanasham Nilkanth (1903) *Journal of a visit to Europe in 1896*, Bombay, D. B. Taraporevala.

9 MUKHOPADHYAY, Bhaskar (1999) “Home and the World. Voyage, traduction et domicile dans la modernité bengalie”. In : “Dossier: L’Europe vue d’ailleurs”, *Genèses. Sciences sociales et histoire*, n° 35, 5-30, 7; CHAKRABARTY, Dipesh (2000) *Provincializing Europe. Postcolonial thought and Historical Difference*, Princeton, Princeton University Press.

## 2.- Universal exhibitions: modernity and progress.

After his first voyage to Europe, which was motivated by his medical studies, it was the orientalist conferences and the universal exhibitions that determined the chronology of Gerson da Cunha's European travels<sup>10</sup>. The construction of his identity as a historian was inseparable from his experiences in Europe, from the visual tours he enjoyed on his visits to exhibitions as well as the conferences of specialists which did so much to legitimize him among his peers and within the world of orientalists which was made up mostly of European men. It was not by chance that many of these international conferences in different areas of knowledge, which grew enormously throughout the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, coincided with the major universal exhibitions. One of the many publications that came out dealing with the *Exposition Universelle de Paris* of 1889 announced the 67 different conferences, most of them international, which would occur while the *Exposition* was open to the public<sup>11</sup>.

On the one hand, both the conferences and the exhibitions were born of the same desire to obtain knowledge of the world, visual and written, of the same *forma mentis* and the same totalizing values; both favoured the meeting of people or of objects coming from all parts of the world and, as their names indicated, aspired to a "universal" or an "international" totality. On the other hand, the travelling of a great number of people coming from various corners of the world, as was the case with Gerson da Cunha, meant that it made sense that different events occurring in the same city should coincide in time. In spite of the huge changes that were taking place in the means of transport during this period, and which also are in themselves linked to the demands of these temporary events, to travel still meant high costs and large lengths of time. As he could not take part in all the Orientalist conferences that, as from

10 CUNHA, José Gerson da (1867) "Exposição Universal de Paris (Impressões e belezas). Fragmento da Minha Viagem pelo Egypto, França, Inglaterra e Escoçia", *Ulamar*, year 9, n° 455, December, 3-4; n° 456, 27 December, 3-4.; "Recordações da minha viagem pelo Egypto, França, Inglaterra e Escóssia", *Instituto Vasco da Gama*, 2ª series (1873), 189-191, 212-216, 242-245, 263-267, 283-286.

11 The article included a list of many of these events, which reveals their thematic diversity. Some examples: Conference for the protection of works of art and of monuments; Peace Conference; on matters relating to alcoholism; mental health; homeopathy; fire-workers; criminal anthropology; photography; the use of river water; or, Conference for the Study of Colonial Matters. In (1889): "Sessantasette Congressi", *Parigi e L'Esposizione Universale del 1889*, n° 5, June 1889, Milan, Treves, 39.



1873, took place almost biannually, in various European cities, Gerson da Cunha seems to have planned his visits to coincide with the great exhibitions that were organized in the French capital about every ten years.

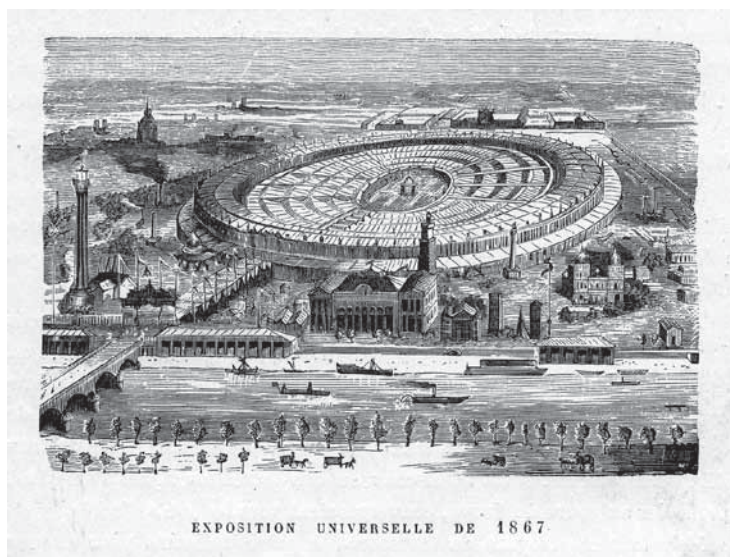


Fig. 2. "Exposition Universelle de 1867", in A. S. de Doncourt, *Les Expositions Universelles* (Paris: J. Lefort, éditeur), p. 93. Private collection.

Once he had completed his medical studies in Edinburgh and London in 1867, and before returning to Bombay to open his surgery and thus begin his professional career, Gerson da Cunha set off on his first European tour. From being a student in the colonizing metropolis of almost the whole of India, he became a cosmopolitan tourist, travelling for the pleasure of travelling, a reason that was becoming legitimate to an increasing number of people. In his previous Europe, in the British colonial metropolis, he had been identified as an Indian, a native of the colonies who, as so many others of his social status, had come over to study. In Paris, however, his persona went beyond a colonial context, and allowed him to become a citizen of the world, a *flâneur* of the 19<sup>th</sup> century capital<sup>12</sup>. Gerson da Cunha could experience another identity while taking advantage of the railways which were making Europe

12 BENJAMIN, Walter (1889) *Paris, capitale du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle: le livre des passages*, traduit de l'allemand par Jean Lacoste d'après l'édition originale établie par Rolf Tiedemann, Paris, Éditions du Cerf.



ever smaller or as a visitor to an Exhibition, one of the forms invented in 19<sup>th</sup> century Europe to demonstrate its classificatory and encyclopedic dominion of the world. Was not the exhibition communicating the values of universal harmony, of peace between peoples, of fraternity beyond frontiers? Many other citizens from outside Europe, either wearing Western dress or showing their difference in their clothes and physiognomy, were, like him, walking round the exhibition as well as round the city that was, in fact, a part of it. The many journals that described and displayed the event through texts and images, were eager to explore these foreigners usually out of sight. In a peaceful multi-cultural atmosphere, where there seemed to be no evidence of colonial violence or of conflict between nations, there was room for the non-European to become a tourist.

Gerson da Cunha published two articles on his first visit to Europe: the first came out a few months after the visit to the exhibition in a popular Goan newspaper: "Universal Exhibition of Paris. (Impressions and beauties). Fragment of my journey through Egypt, France, England and Scotland". In fact his report only includes a description of his visit to the Parisian *Exposition Universelle*, but it is probable, as suggested by the title, that this was only a "fragment" of his tour and that he intended to publish the final version in a book, as was usual at the time. The title hid the true motives of his departure for Europe – his studies in the British colonial metropolis – to become part of the tradition of a narrative of leisure travel, which was available to a reduced number of people<sup>13</sup>. The same lack of consistency between the title and the contents is also present in his second article on this same voyage, published a few years later – *Recordações da minha viagem pelo Egypto, França, Inglaterra, e Escossia*<sup>14</sup>. Contrary to what it enunciates, the geography of the narrative includes the departure from Bombay and a historical analysis of the island of Socotorá, close to the African continent, in the Indian Ocean, with no mention even of Egypt.

Gerson da Cunha's first article on his first trip was headed with the name of the hotel in which he stayed in Paris, the *Bonaparte*, in *Saint-Germain-des-Prés*. Giving the time as well as the date, just after one day's visit to the

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13 CUNHA (1867).

14 Six years after publishing his first article on his travels, Gerson da Cunha published a text that appears to be the continuation of his travel narrative, and where he does not mention the universal exhibition. See CUNHA, Gerson da (1873) "Recordações da minha viagem pelo Egypto, França, Inglaterra e Escossia".

Exhibition, the text communicated the immediacy of the relationship between vision and writing, making for a realistic effect: “Puzzled by the vastness and grandeur of the object, I feel it is almost impossible to register in the pages of my small note-book all the emotions that swept through my spirit when I entered the Universal Exhibition in Paris; in that world in miniature, which I have just left.” His over use of adjectives and repeated expressions of enthusiasm about the described object all contribute to a lively and emotional writing, where he also justified his incapacity to transmit the intensity of the feelings raised by the exhibition – “going through varied and rapid sensations that have touched me deeply, so that I fear that any plausible idea escapes me, and makes these notes incomplete”.



Fig. 3. “Cable Têlo-Dynamique, de M. Hirn (grand prix). Machines élévatoires, de MM. Neut et Dumont - Gravure de M. Blanadet”, *L'Exposition Universelle de 1867 Illustrée*, vol. I, p. 337. Private collection.

Among the multiple written discourses generated by these events, his narrative can be placed among the most enthusiastic, a true hymn to the 19<sup>th</sup> century, where the way of writing itself incorporates the fast traces of the rhythms of progress:

“One’s imagination tires and one’s eyes fluctuate timidly without being able to fix a specific object. –Waves of people from every corner of the earth, machinery working feverishly, the quick movement of locomotives and pumps, the

precipitous and restless stream of the visitors, the gayety of the taverns, the roar of the gigantic cascades, other kinds of Niagaras that modern hydraulics have produced in this ephemeral creation of our times: domes, pinnacles, minarets, pyramids, obelisks, made golden by the sunrays, are lost in the vastness of the space, towers that seem to touch the clouds, stupendous lighthouses which are beyond one's sight, and a thousand other charms make this a spectacle which is at the same time agreeable to the eye for its variety and rapid differences, as well as putting fear into one's spirit for its majesty and grandeur<sup>15</sup>."

What "mysterious enchantment or magic" could have created such a spectacle? It would not be wrong to "believe in the stories of the Thousand and One Nights". The French translation of the Thousand and One Nights was published between 1704 and 1717. The expression 'a thousand and one nights' became common and was repeatedly used in all types of writing, from travel narratives, to newspaper articles or historical works. It was used to name everything that was oriental, something that might include a wide geography, but also everything that is full of marvel, surprising, strange or exotic.<sup>16</sup> The title

15 CUNHA (1867).

16 One of the many books that were published on the occasion of the first Paris exhibition visited by Gerson da Cunha also uses the expression when referring to Persia, "pays des Mille et une Nuits", for example: MESNARD, Jules (1867) *Les Merveilles de l'Exposition universelle de 1867*, Paris, Imprimerie générale de Ch. Lahure, 85; Paolo Mantegazza refers to the coronation of the King of Baroda, where he was present, as a vision of 'a thousand and one nights': MANTEGAZZA, Paolo (1884) *India*, Milan, Treves, vol. I, 1-123. When Théodore Chassériau went to Constantine in 1846 at the invitation of the Caliph: "Je suis dans le Mille et Une Nuits", quoted by Anna Finocchi, "Il fascino dell'Oriente", or Theophile Gautier, *Constantinople* (1853): "La realtà, si dice, è sempre inferiore al sogno, ma qui la realtà sorpassava il sogno. I racconti dell' *mille e una notte* non offrono niente di più magico", quoted by PIETROMARCHI, Luca (1998) "Come un ricordo rinnovato": l'Oriente letterario dei viaggiatori romantici". In: FINNOCHI, Anna (ed.) *Il Fascino dell'Oriente nelle Arti del XIX Secolo in Europa*, Milan, Skira; Museo Bagatti Valsecchi, 11-19, 18, 43-50, 46. While describing the arrival of oriental objects in Portugal, Souza Viterbo wrote that "all of them brought a recollection of the Orient and there was nobody who did not bring to the mind one of the dreams of the Thousand and One Nights". In: SOUSA VITERBO (1893) "O Orientalismo em Portugal no Século XVI", *Boletim da Sociedade de Geografia*, 12ª Série, nº 78, July-August, 317-330. In its many versions, the book *One Thousand and One Nights* had become popular everywhere: in Tirutani (India), a young man called Krishna, who was curious about the presence of the European stranger, started a conversation with Gubernatis and proudly showed him the book he was holding – a shorter version, in English of the *Thousand and One Nights*, in DE GUBERNATIS, Angelo (1887) *Peregrinazioni Indiane. India Meridionale e Seilan*, Florence, Tip. editrice di L. Niccolai, vol. II, 73-74. On the role of Richard Burton over the translation of the *Book of the Thousand and One Nights* into english, see KENNEDY, Dane (2005) *The Highly Civilized Man. Richard Burton and the Victorian World*, Cambridge, Mass.; London, Harvard University Press, 221-247; BURTON, Richard F., trans. (1885) *The Book of the Thousand Nights and a Night*, Benares, Kama Shastra Society.

of this book served Gerson da Cunha to describe universal exhibitions, one of the most quoted examples of progress used to identify modern nations. The recurrent uses of water, light and gas – three sources of energy and movement – contributed to the magical and unreal effect of the general experience of the exhibition to which the Goan gave special attention. By analyzing the machines, the technology, as if they were organic beings, alive, natural, almost human, Gerson da Cunha used a descriptive strategy that was very common at the time. The Champ de Mars needed water as much as “the human body”, for it was through water that life and movement were spread throughout “all that organism of machinery” and it was water which “transformed into steam was able to move those enormous steel muscles”. “Five pumps, like five iron lungs” took the water from the Seine to that city-body, as alive as it was ephemeral – “life is distributed throughout this immense body by ramified arteries laid side by side, one transporting water, the other gas.” The machine, conceived by human intellect, thus became a prolongation of the body and, by doing so, became less threatening. One of the objectives of these exhibitions was precisely to bring closer the modern technological human inventions, to make them natural and intelligible to the everyday life of the near future. Far from feeling detached from this message, Gerson da Cunha received it with enthusiasm and, when transmitting it to his Goan compatriots, became himself an intermediary of that progress. He appears not as an observer but as an active agent of the modernity that he describes.

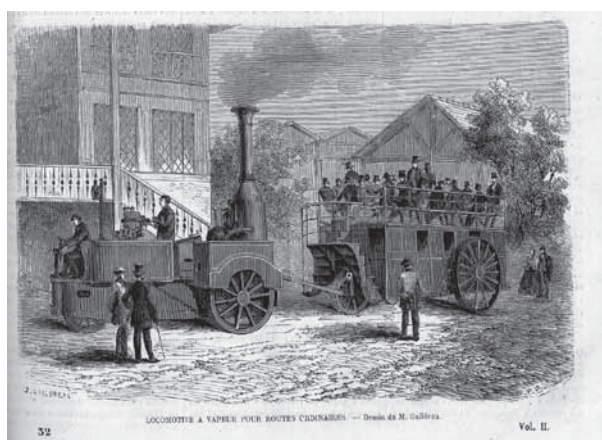


Fig. 4. “Locomotive a vapeur pour routes ordinaires”, *L'Exposition Universelle de 1867 Illustrée*, vol. II, p. 17. Private collection.

The metaphors and images that Gerson da Cunha used reproduce the language that was generally present in the descriptions of these events, a panoply of adjectives that had already been canonized by the huge quantity of written material that was published whenever a universal exhibition was organised. The exhibition was a “living encyclopedia”, a “world in miniature”, a “celebration of industry and art”, a “universal city”, a “glory of industry”. The park, where visitors could see “circuses, hippodromes, dioramas, cycloramas, human aquariums, fish tanks”, flora from all countries or pools with Venetian gondolas, became a “truly cosmopolitan residence”. Diversity was also a characteristic of the architectural styles of all places and of all times, and that was also the case with the visitors, who were both social and geographically very diverse. “From those belonging to the highest aristocracy”, monarchs and princes, up to the most “humble layers of society”, all hastened to the center of Paris. The diversity of people became very visible in the clothing worn by the crowds walking along the *Champ de Mars*: there were the “beautiful and elegant gowns of the polished Parisian ladies”, as well as “Turkish fezzes, head circles, turbans and various other apparels, some of which were even grotesque or fantastical”. No reference was made to any other form of ethnic or national identity, or to the presence of other Indians. It may be understood that Gerson da Cunha visited the exhibition wearing the western clothes he normally chose.

The classification system used at the Exhibition Palace, first tried out in 1867 and which would not be used again in subsequent Parisian exhibitions, is another of the themes taken up by Gerson da Cunha. Similar to the “gigantic Roman coliseum”, the interior space was made up of concentric galleries, that could be visited in two different directions, each one of which corresponded to two different systems of classification, that were comparable to the. If the visitor chose to walk down the curved lines of the round building, he would obtain a sight of the same type of product in its multiple national versions – machines, cloths or raw-materials, for instance; if, on the contrary, he chose to follow the corridors that crossed the concentric galleries transversally, in the direction of the heart of the circle, each corridor with the name of a different country, he might see the different types of products sent by one same country.

There was another “philosophical thought” that was behind this visual encyclopedia: as the visitor moved to the center of the building, he would pass from the material to the intellectual order, from food or furniture to

works of art<sup>17</sup>. At the heart of this world, conceived by Le Play, the general commissioner, with the collaboration of Krantz, Chevalier and Eiffel, there were, in fact, two very distinct exhibitions which attested to both of the main ideas of the exhibition: one was to uniformize the weights and measures and represented the principles of international trade and harmony that these events wanted to consolidate; the showing of the *Monuments historiques français*, on the other hand, contributed to reinforce the central role of France as the epitome of good taste, but also as the center of both worlds, that which was recreated by the exhibition and the real world. The visitor could see the world, simultaneously, through two different approaches – national or material –, and thus literally and physically, entering into the rationality of the period. Trading on an equal basis between different countries was considered to be a guarantee of peace. Within this context, the establishment of a uniform, international system of weights, measures and currency, was promoted during the exhibition as one of the most pragmatic ways of illustrating the closeness between peoples.

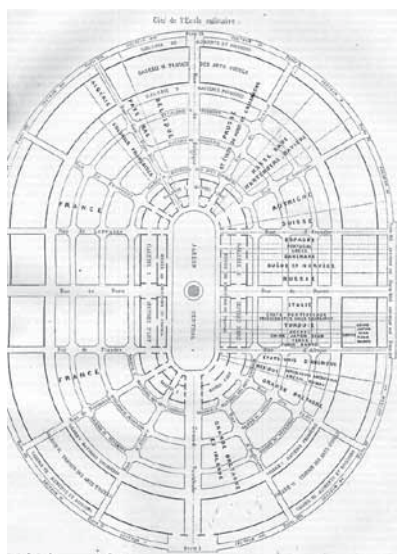


Fig. 5. "Plan du Palais avec les divisions par puissances, par rues transversales et par rues concentriques", *L'Exposition Universelle de 1867 Illustrée*, vol. II, p. 205. Private collection.

17 LIMIDO, Luisa (2005) "Illustrée. Le Champ de Mars dans le sillage d'Hausmann". In: BACHA, Myriam (ed.) *Les Expositions Universelles à Paris de 1855 à 1937*, Paris, Action artistique de la Ville de Paris, 68-72.



The experience of inventing a space in the form of a snail which would be able to catalogue the world as if it were a children's game did not seem to work because in the following exhibition, that of 1878, the world broke up and each nation was allowed an independent area where it could show a diversity of objects and products to identify it. The world that in 1867 was exposed simultaneously on the basis of two criteria – that of national identification and that of the nature of the exposed object – became a world where those two principles came together in a single space. The 1878 Exhibition, which Gerson da Cunha also visited, inaugurated a display typology that would last until present times: a *Rue des Nations* where, through the possibilities of a temporary material, each nation had the opportunity of inventing a national architectural style for a national and international gaze.

Apart from describing the excessive visibility of the 1867 exhibition, Gerson da Cunha also became an interpreter of its invisible ideology. Underlying the display of everything that humanity had ever achieved, from trade to industry, from science to the arts, there was freedom and fraternity, the “civilizing” feelings that best showed the tendency of humanity towards a communion of peoples. The exhibition symbolized the meeting of nations, a “federation”, an “alliance”, “a friendly hug”, the “illustrated spirit of the peoples”, a “fraternal communion of wills and ideas”, the “grandiose idea of the general federation of the world”.

Coming from all parts of the globe, the visitors gathered “round the word progress”, in a “feeling of admiration for the genius of the 19<sup>th</sup> century”. In this ode to the values purposed by the exhibition, there were no sign of conflicts, colonial empires or wars. With the optimism that characterized many of the discourses on the universal exhibitions, the description given by the Goan reveals that these events also worked as neutralizers of inequalities and conflicts.

These were times of great transformations in the practice and reasons for travel, which were, of course, reflected in the multiplication of way of writing about it. But in spite of this, the discourse on universal exhibitions during this period reveals a certain type of code about what should be seen and how it should be seen, which was shared by a multiplicity of individuals throughout the world. To begin with, these travelers often read the same travel books while also using the guides, catalogues and leaflets that suggested a specific way of looking at a city or at an exhibition; secondly, these travelers, although of different origins, often belonged to an intellectual elite who shared cultural

references and texts, all of which influenced their manner of representing what they were able to see. Thus, the narratives on exhibitions were inseparable from a textual and visual culture which determined ways of observing that were also present in Goa or Bombay<sup>18</sup>.

Gerson da Cunha shared this cosmopolitan culture exposed in Paris and the fact that he makes no comment on the Goan or Indian presence at the exhibition may be interpreted as a way to reinforce his total complicity with the visual discourses of progress and modernity. The Indian representation at the exhibition included works of art and artifacts but not the modern machinery presented by other nations. The adjectives chosen to describe it – immobility, continuity, permanence – contrast with those chosen by Gerson da Cunha to put in words his version of the exhibition<sup>19</sup>. His visit to the exhibition does not confront him with his native Goa or with the India which his physiognomy revealed as being his place of origin. Only some years later, in a historical and philological article on the Konkani language and culture, did Gerson da Cunha refer to having seen a “Goan” object in the Portuguese section of the 1867 *Exposition Universelle*: some of the oldest publications printed in Goan presses<sup>20</sup>.

Inside the Portuguese section of the Paris Universal Exhibition, side by side with objects that had come from other Portuguese colonies, the Goan section was part of a visual narrative aimed at showing the strength of the Portuguese Empire. But it is worth noting that although all the objects presented had arrived from Lisbon, the place where all materials coming from the colonies were brought together before leaving for yet another exhibition, the Goan initiative is much more significant than might appear at first hand. This is confirmed by the document titled *Relation of the Objects sent to*

18 P. H. Hoffenberg noted that in the beginning of the 1880s the library of the Royal Asiatic Society of Bengal owned catalogues of exhibitions held in places as different as Bombay, Dublin, London, Manchester or Sidney, HOFFENBERG, Peter H. (2001) *An Empire on Display. English, Indian, and Australian Exhibitions from the Crystal Palace to the Great War*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 13.

19 HOFFENBERG (2001), 158; (1868) *Paris Universal Exhibition, 1867. Part II. Catalogue of the Works Exhibited in the British Section of the Exhibition*, London, George E. Eyre and William Spottiswoode.

20 “I myself saw this work [he is referring to a work written in Konkani by Fr. Diogo Ribeiro published in 1632] at that time in Paris, but a correct list of all the works thus exhibited will be found in the interesting *brochure* of Mr. I. Gracias, entitled *A Imprensa em Goa*, published last year at New-Goa”, in CUNHA, J. Gerson da (1881) *The Konkani Language and Literature*. For the *Bombay Gazetteer*, Bombay, the Government Central Press, 32.

the Central Commission of Lisbon for the Universal Exhibition of 1867 in Paris<sup>21</sup>. To ignore the initiative of the Goan and to see the representation of Goa in Paris only as an example of the use of visual culture in the colonial affirmation of the nation, would be diminishing the agency of those locals who also took part in the decisions about what should represent them. In his book, which is centered on exhibitions organized in a variety of imperial contexts, Hoffenberg underlines the role of the natives in the constitution of their representations in Europe, which in some cases was much more active than might be imagined. The author also states that some natives of the colonies used the exhibition possibilities with nationalistic aims, and therefore anti-colonial objectives<sup>22</sup>.

The universal exhibitions continued to be an essential sight for Gerson da Cunha during his subsequent European tours. In 1878, immediately after the International Orientalist Conference that took place in Florence, he left for Paris to visit the *Exposition Universelle*, where the largest ever show of Indian material culture to be seen in Europe was on display. In 1882, Gerson da Cunha avowed that he wished to visit the 1883 Amsterdam International Exhibition and take part in the Orientalist Conference that would be taking place at the same time<sup>23</sup>. The dates of the Conference were not yet known and, he remarked, the Indian newspapers “were not able to clarify this matter” while the men in Bombay “no nothing of these things” for they preferred to use their time trading in cotton and in opium<sup>24</sup>. However, for unknown reasons, his intention of returning to Europe in 1883, did not come about.

21 (1866) *Relação dos Objectos enviados à Comissão central de Lisboa para a exposição universal de 1867 em Paris*, Nova Goa, Imprensa Nacional. It might even be asked if by constructing a visual identity for a territory that had its own unique characteristics, the Goan and Portuguese elites who lived in Goa, were not contributing to an idea of nation which, ultimately, no longer depended on a colonizing metropolis.

22 HOFFENBERG (2001), 5, 59-60. See my articles on exhibitions in Goa or on representations of “Portuguese India” in European exhibitions: VICENTE, Filipa (2002) “A Exposição do corpo sagrado de S. Francisco Xavier e as exposições industriais e agrícolas em Goa”, *Oriente*, nº 4, December, 55-66; VICENTE, Filipa (2003) “The Colonies on Display: representations of the Portuguese *Estado da Índia* in exhibitions abroad”, *Estudos do Século XX*, nº 3, 37-55; VICENTE, Filipa (2004) “Exposições coloniais na Índia portuguesa e na Índia britânica (séculos XIX e XX)”, *Oriente*, nº 8, April, 70-88.

23 Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale di Firenze, manoscritti, carteggio Angelo De Gubernatis, corresp. José Gerson da Cunha to Angelo De Gubernatis, nº 26, Bombay, 39 Hornby Road, 1 de Novembro de 1882: “moreover I shall pass through you Florence on my way to Amsterdam in 1884”.

24 Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale di Firenze, manoscritti, *ibid.*, nº 27, Bombay, 39 Hornby Road, 19 de Janeiro de 1883.

Finally, in 1889, Gerson da Cunha was able to announce from Paris: "Here I am again in Europe, after an absence of 11 years, years that were filled with fatigue and worries<sup>25</sup>." It was only in that year that the organization of another Orientalist Conference and another Universal Exhibition, made him leave Bombay. This time the Conference was to take place in Stockholm while the Exhibition once again made Paris the center of the world. Finally, he went to Europe for the fourth and last time, to take part in the 12<sup>th</sup> International Orientalist Conference, in Rome, in 1899. But it seems that he did not take the time to go to the great 1900 Parisian exhibition and, on his return to Bombay, died shortly afterwards.

It makes sense to compare Gerson da Cunha's attitude with that of the Portuguese cultural elite, who also travelled to Paris on purpose to see the great exhibitions. In these European cities, which were considered the centers of progress and of civilization, and in the spaces that celebrated the values presented in the universal exhibitions, they were confronted by the backwardness of their own country. The bibliography on the universal exhibitions tends to divide the world between "Europe" and the rest, not taking into account the very great differences and imbalances within Europe itself, which the hierarchies put on display in the exhibitions contributed to reinforce. The result of this awareness was put into words that became, very often, a denunciation and a critique of the writer's own country, as well as constituting an ode to that progress that seemed to be so far from home. For Portuguese 19<sup>th</sup> century writers such as Camilo Castelo Branco, Eça de Queirós, Ramalho Ortigão, or others such as the journalist Júlio César Machado, to go to Paris or to London to see the "progresses of civilization" with admiration and enthusiasm always implied criticism, either ironic or sad, about their own country, which seen from the stance of the marvels of the century appeared to be even poorer and further away. It follows that in this contrast between the peripheral position of their nation and the center they were describing, they placed themselves at the center, in a communion with the values on show in Paris or London, which distanced them from their country of origin. Gerson da Cunha also identified with those values. But unlike the Portuguese equivalents, the recognition and enthusiasm with which he experienced the exhibitions do not lead him to criticize his place of origin.

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25 Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale di Firenze, manoscritti, *ibid.*, nº 48, carte postale, Paris, Hotel Brighton, rue de Rivoli, 218, 9 de Junho de 1889.

The commentaries that Gerson da Cunha made on the visible and invisible meanings of the 1867 Universal Exhibition may, therefore, be included in the common typology of contemporary writings on the theme of the exhibitions: written in Portuguese, for a cultured Goan audience, nothing in his description of the event reveals the look of someone from the outside looking at a symbol of European progress; on the contrary, he writes as “one of them”, as a member of the community of nations which, based on the values present throughout the exhibition, attempted at eradicating the differences that separated the various parts of the world, even when one of the results of the exhibition was precisely to show those differences together. The man who writes is a modern man who feels in harmony with the values proposed and who is enthusiastic about the paths announced by the exhibition.